

Defense & National Security

Protecting the safety and freedom of our citizens is the paramount duty of our government. To meet that duty, we must ensure our military is the best equipped and trained fighting force in the world. The core of that force is the men and women who serve in our armed forces, and who deserve our support.

I've voted to increase the pay of our military personnel and ensure their families are provided for while they are serving away from home. I have also helped lead efforts to provide the most up-to-date equipment, including special armoring for Humvees in Iraq and Afghanistan, state of the art laser guidance and vision systems, and high speed patrol vessels - all of which are made right here in Southwest Washington.

We must also take care of our service personnel when they return home. I have worked in veterans hospitals and clinics and I know the physical and emotional toll that war can take. Because of my experience I am absolutely committed to making sure our military and veterans hospitals are fully-funded and staffed. It is also why I believe we must do a better job of taking care of the mental health needs of soldiers and their families; I have written legislation to improve access to counseling and therapy for returning servicemen and women, and ensure their confidentiality is protected.

Our nation has a proud history of defending freedom at home and abroad. Though we must only go to war when it is a last resort, we have never been afraid to answer the call of duty when necessary. No one knows better than soldiers the need to work for peace, but sometimes force is necessary to achieve that peace and we must always stand ready.

Supporting Washington's Active Duty, Guard, and Reserve Service Members

When Guardsmen and Reservists leave their civilian lives to fulfill their military duties, they are often forced to leave behind not only their loved ones, but also their careers. More than half of our Guardsmen and Reservists earn less income in the military than their civilian salary. Congressman Baird joined many of his colleagues in seeking funds to cover part of this pay difference. This provision was included in a Defense Authorization bill for Guardsmen and Reservists serving for more than 18 months.

Congressman Baird also cosponsored the Equity for Reservists Pay Act, which would help tens of thousands of Reservists and National Guardsmen by requiring the federal government to compensate for the lost income of any civilian employee called to active-duty military service. The bill would also create a number of tax incentives to encourage private employers to eliminate pay-gaps suffered by their employees, and it would establish an incentive formula for rewarding states and municipalities that take similar steps.

Congressman

Baird has also worked to expand healthcare benefits for members and families of the Guard and Reserve. He voted for a bill to make all activated members of the Reserve or National Guard, as well as their families, eligible for TRICARE. This legislation requires that the Department of Defense make all mobilized Reservists and their families eligible for full TRICARE benefits at least 90 days prior to the beginning of their active duty service, and that such coverage continue for at least 180 days following separation from active duty. He has also voted to prohibit increases in fees service members pay for TRICARE.

Congressman Baird has repeatedly supported strong pay raises for our service members above those requested in the President's budget. In 2006, he supported a 2.2% basic pay increase, and in 2007 a 3.5% basic pay increase.

Bringing Defense Jobs to Southwest Washington

From high technology to shipbuilding, defense-related industry provides thousands of jobs in Southwest Washington, while producing weapons and equipment critical to our national security. Working closely with members of the Oregon delegation, Congressman Baird obtained funding for a high speed semi-submersible delivery vehicle that is the state of the art for small, fast, and stealthy littoral zone combat vessels.

In addition to shipbuilding, our area is home to the most advanced laser manufacturing facilities in the world. With applications ranging from advanced, eye-safe battlefield illumination to protection of jets from surface to air missiles, these lighter, more powerful, and more portable lasers are revolutionizing defense and war fighting in countless ways. Federal funds requested by Congressman Baird have supported both the research and manufacturing for these vital and valuable systems.

Unfortunately, the conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan have led to a great deal of wounded soldiers. To help troops injured in the field, Congressman Baird has supported efforts to develop and fielded an advanced bandage. The bandage seals off an injury, protecting it from infection and reducing recovery time. The Army Surgeon General has requested that every deployed soldier in a combat zone be issued at

least one bandage.

The conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan have also shown how vulnerable our Humvee and other personnel carriers are to attacks from small arms, including rocket propelled grenades. To help protect our troops, Congressman Baird has worked closely with a local company that manufactures armor systems on a new force protection system that will detonate incoming explosives at a distance.

Using Our Defense Money Wisely

While supporting our troops to the fullest and ensuring they have the weapons and equipment they need, Congressman Baird is also committed to ensuring that money is not wasted on unnecessary or ineffective weapons. He has voted to terminate funding for expensive and outmoded Cold War weapons systems such as the Comanche attack helicopter and the Crusader artillery system.

Congressman

Baird has also supported reforms to the defense contracting process. He voted for legislation that would limit the ability of the Department of Defense to enter into non-competitive contracts, which allow companies to enter into contracts with the government, potentially worth billions of dollars, without any type of competition or oversight. The legislation would limit these contracts to true emergency situations and not allow them to last beyond eight months. It also requires full disclosure and justification of these contracts by the Department of Defense.

Caring for our Wounded Warriors

As a health care professional, Congressman Baird has worked in veterans hospitals and clinics and knows firsthand the physical and emotional scars that combat inflicts. In Congress, he has strongly advocated increased support to meet the health care needs of our soldiers and their families. One study by the Walter Reed Army Institute of Research found that more than 1/3 of the soldiers returning from service sought some type of psychological assistance. Congressman Baird has been a primary sponsor of legislation that would authorize further study to enhance our understanding of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and other mental health conditions, establish programs to identify and treat soldiers with mental health conditions, and offer counseling to family members of injured or deceased combat soldiers. He also supported legislation, the Joshua Omvig Suicide Prevention Act, to establish a new suicide prevention program for our service members who have returned from overseas.

Congressman Baird also supported the Wounded Warrior Assistance Act. The bill responds to the deficiencies found at Walter Reed Medical Center by assigning a medical case manager to each wounded service member to ensure they are receiving the care they need. It also tries to smooth the transition for service members moving from the Department

of Defense medical system to the Department of Veteran Affairs system.

Congressman Baird frequently pays visits to Walter Reed Army Medical Center and Bethesda Naval Hospital to visit our returning wounded. If our nation chooses to send its sons and daughters off to war, we must ensure they have the finest health care in the world when they return, and Congressman Baird is committed to seeing first hand that they do.

Department
of Defense

U.S.
Army

U.S.
Navy

U.S.
Marine Corps

U.S.
Air Force

U.S.
Coast Guard

Washington
State National Guard

Senate
Committee on Armed Services

House
Armed Services Committee

